



We were all poets...

Music for Classical & Electric Guitars with Synthesizers

These pieces incorporate elements of classical, jazz, Latin, rock and New Age -- some of which were written for theatrical and television productions. The title cut was used in my soundtrack to the WGBY-TV documentary "W.E.B. du Bois of Great Barrington" -- which was nominated for a New England Grammy Award.

total time: 45:56

Jeffrey Steele guitars & synthesizers

Recorded at Montague Music Studio, 1991-92 Turners Falls, MA

DAY

- 1] Dawn in the Andes (7:14)
- 2] We were all poets... (4:41)
- 3] La Alegria (1:36)
- 4] Serenade for the Unafraid (7:17)
- 5] The New World (2:19)

NIGHT

- 6] Halibut Point (5:23)
- 7] Plum Island (2:52)
- 8] Outlines in the Mist (4:01)
- 9] Memories (3:42)
- 10] The First Light (2:41)
- 11] Prayer for Justice (4:10)

NOTES

Looking back over this collection pieces -- recorded over five years ago and composed as many as eight years before that -- "We were all poets" now strikes me as an elegy to the Central America solidarity movement of the 1980's. Indeed, many of us felt -- as did the Nation Thief character quoted below -- like poets in a New World; where our efforts to bring greater attention to injustice in that region paralleled our inner journey of greater self-realization. Most of the pieces were initially inspired by experiences in, or concerning, Nicaragua -- though one would not be likely to infer this from simply hearing them. Others refer to Gloucester, where I was born and have, since making this recording, re-

turned to live. Many of them began life as songs whose melodies outgrew the need for words. The culmination of five years experimentation and study of synthesis and MIDI, it represents hundreds of hours of chiseling and refining. And while my music has taken an increasingly acoustic direction in the intervening years, I continue to take pride in -- and enjoy listening to -- this opus.

Jeffry Steele, March 1997

Dawn in the Andes

When I lived in Cambridge in the early eighties, many of my friends were taking trips to South America. My upstairs neighbor brought back with her a wonderful record by the Peruvian group Savia Andina. I couldn't get one tune out of my head, so I incorporated it into a piece I was writing, Pablo Neruda's Funeral. Scored for piano, trumpet, electric guitar and percussion, it was performed on my two "Voices of Latin America" concerts in the Fall of '83. Four years later, I revived the theme and variations portion of the piece and wrote a new introduction based on the first three notes of the first theme (E-B-A). What you first hear are those three notes sounded at the same time, as a chord -- with the instrumentation changing for each successive note. The next chord is the same thing up another half-step (G#-D#-C#) and the last one (F#-A#-F) is comprised of the three remaining notes of the twelve-tone scale. I also imported the original bombo (drum) pattern, which was somewhere in between a triplet and a dotted rhythm. The manner in which the larger zampoña (pan pipes) are naturally played -- with notes alternating between players who need an entire breath for each one -- is emulated here through stereo placement.

"We were all poets. . ."

This was originally written in the Fall of 1985 for the theater production "The Nation Thief" (David Perrigo's adaptation of the novel by Robert Houston) in which I played the part of U.S. mercenary leader William Walker. The music underscored a speech in which Walker's black surgeon describes Nicaragua's beauty: "And in the cool air of the morning, before the rains came, we saw a line of volcanoes like lace on the horizon, like the world was about to be created all over again. Yes we were all poets that first morning, poets." This music was also featured in my score to the TV documentary "W.E.B. Du Bois of Great Barrington" (WGBY, PBS station out of Springfield, MA).

La Alegria

Originally conceived of as a song, it is titled for the annual festival in Nicaragua, La Alegria (The Rejoicing). It is my "Gypsy Kings" number.

Serenade for the Unafraid

Again, these melodies first came through fancying themselves songs. As each song fragment had heroism as a common theme, I strung them together -- with transitions and bridges -- into an appropriately titled "medley". The first section -- then the song "Emilia"

-- was originally written for and performed by Sue Kranz, while she was a member of my trio Por la Paz.

The New World

Also used in "The Nation Thief", it was the music to which William Walker marched triumphantly into Grenada, Nicaragua, in the 1850's.

Halibut Point

Just off the coast near my parents' home was a large bell buoy its four bells struck by clappers hinged in four directions. The "music" it made therefore depended on how the waves tossed the buoy. This piece commemorates the thousands of fishermen who went down during Gloucester's hey-day as a fishing port; perhaps it is their restless souls that sound the buoy bells. All the "nature sounds" heard here, and in the other pieces recorded in this album, are synthesized -- as I preferred the aesthetic challenge in programming such sounds to recording them from life.

Plum Island

Across the bay from Halibut Point lies Plum Island, a seven-mile stretch of sand, most of which is protected as a Wildlife Sanctuary. Moonlight sparkling on the water is emulated by this musical texture.

Outlines in the Mist

Sketched in Managua (along with "The New World") and shared as jam session material with fellow musicians on the first Arts for a New Nicaragua brigade. The intro was written to accompany a nocturnal scene in "The Nation Thief".

Memories

Originally planned as a "classical" song lamenting the murder of a Nicaraguan family, the electric guitar here aspires to the intensity of the human voice.

The First Light

This started out as a coda to a rather violent piece. It has since been slowed further and used to accompany meditation.

Prayer for Justice

Written just after returning from Nicaragua in 1984, this "British ballad" was a song titled "Love Is" -- sung in performance at that time by Rosemarie Strajer and Laura Burns (who went on to form Flor de Caña).